CHRISTIANITY OR COMMUNISM? ŽIŽEK'S MARXIAN HEGELIANISM AND HEGELIAN MARXISM

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"Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge"
Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

"From one moment to the next / Red negativity in the street / Now I think it's all right to feel inhuman"
Animal Collective, *For Reverend Green*

Introduction

It is generally assumed that Slavoj Žižek's works result from an unproblematic synthesis of his innovative readings of Lacan, Hegel, and Marx. In this regard, Alain Badiou's opinion should be taken as emblematic: "Today, Slavoj Žižek is possibly the only thinker who is able to keep himself as close as possible to Lacan's contributions and, at the same time, support with continuity and energy a return to the Idea of communism. The fact is that his actual master is Hegel, of whom he proposes a completely new interpretation".[1] Leaving aside Žižek's appropriation of Lacan — which is both highly original, especially in its pedagogic intentions, and still indebted to a basic Millerian interpretative framework — I would like to focus on the role played by Hegel and Marx in two of his most recent, and compelling, writings. Initially, one cannot but be struck by the way in which the authors in question appear to be, against all expectations, repeatedly opposed to each other. This is particularly evident in "The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity", one of the long articles Žižek contributed to *The Monstrosity of Christ* (2009), and to a lesser degree in *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (2009). If the former text advances that "something happens in Hegel, a breakthrough into a unique dimension of thought, which is obliterated, rendered invisible in its true dimen-

[1] A. Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2009), p. 187.

sion, by postmetaphysical thought"[2] (including Marx's, who is, in this piece, the post-Hegelian philosopher Žižek refers to the most), the latter — whose very title paraphrases a passage from Marx's "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction" (1843-4) — puts forward Žižek's own "communist hypothesis" and concedes that there are "two versions of Hegelianism", one of which is irremediably "conservative".[3] To the best of my knowledge, commentators have not yet confronted these tensions — which, in different and more attenuated guises, could also be tracked back to earlier books — preferring to take for granted a perfect overlapping of dialectics with Marxism in the thought of the Slovenian philosopher.

The Monstrosity of Man

In the seventy-six pages of "The Fear of Four Words", Žižek explicitly criticises Marx and Marxism from a Hegelian standpoint on at least five occasions.[4] His attack revolves around one major issue. First and foremost, Hegel's philosophy of *religion* is the only "philosophy which thought the implications of the four words ['He was made man'] through to the end"; for this very reason, it alone allows us appropriately to approach the "'big' ontological question" concerning human nature and the related problem of freedom in a materialist way.[5] On the other hand, Marx's *critique* of religion — which Žižek further qualifies, in the same article, as "standard Marxist", "young Marx-Feuerbachian", and "Feuerbachian-young Marx pseudo-Hegelian" — [6] proposes a "direct dis-alienation" that ultimately relies on an idealist presupposition, namely, the primordial unity of subject and object.[7] Žižek develops his argument cogently. Hegel's great merit is to show the way in which the Christian "God's self-alienation", the fact that He antagonistically becomes part of his own creation, doubts himself and dies on the cross, "overlaps with the alienation from God of the human individual who experiences himself as alone in a godless world".[8] Therefore, man's own dis-alienation — his reconciliation with God — cannot

2 S. Žižek, "The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity", in S. Žižek and J. Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectics?* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 26-27.

3 S. Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 148.

4 "The Fear of Four Words", p. 59, pp. 73-76, p. 80, p. 105, p. 107.

5 *Ibid*., p. 26. "The ultimate question is thus: in what kind of universe is freedom possible? What ontology does freedom imply?" (*ibid*., p. 82).

6 *Ibid*., p. 59, p. 73, p. 75, p. 76.

7 *Ibid*., p. 73.

8 *Ibid*., p. 57.

relegate Incarnation to the subaltern role of an epiphenomenal mediation which would simply be needed for the sake of mankind's final redemption/salvation and, thus, exclusively posited from the perspective of man as a means to reach God. Dis-alienation can only take place through the full assumption of the "monstrosity" [*das Ungeheure*] of Christ, the "inappropriateness in general" [*die Unangemessenheit ueberhaupt*] of the appearance of God in the body of a human animal.[9] Such inappropriateness structurally informs both human *and* divine nature, marking the threshold of their indistinction: while God is divine only as a "God [who] made Himself man, [so] that man might become God *who made Himself man*", man is truly human only by identifying with Christ, the crucified dead God.[10]

This view of reconciliation through an identification with "inappropriateness" is precisely what, according to Žižek, would be missing from Marx's critique of religion as man's self-alienation — the thesis for which religion is the opium of the people created *by* the people — and, more importantly, from his general logic of dis-alienation — the idea of progress towards the universal equality of communism. In other words, Marx would fail to appreciate that (religious) alienation — which, in this context, we could also call "dis-unity" — is not just a product of man's positing, but the presupposition of his very own ability to posit. Given its clarity, it is worth quoting in full the passage in which Žižek develops this argument:

> The limit of the Feuerbachian-Marxian logic of dis-alienation is that of positing presuppositions: the subject overcomes its alienation by recognizing itself as the active agent which itself posited what appears to it as its substantial presupposition. In religious terms, this would amount to the direct (re)appropriation of God by humanity: the mystery of God is man, "God" is nothing but the reified/substantialized version of human collective activity, and so on. What is missing here is the properly Christian gesture: in order to posit the presupposition (to "humanize" God, reduce him to an expression/result of human activity), the (human-subjective) *positing itself should be "presupposed", located in God as the substantial ground-presupposition of man, as its own becoming-human/finite*. The reason is the subject's constitutive finitude: the full positing of presuppositions would amount to [the] subject's full retroactive positing/generation of its presuppositions, i.e., the subject would be absolutized into the full self-origin.[11]

9 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

I think we could go as far as suggesting that, for Žižek, the "Feuerbachian-Marxian logic of dis-alienation" tacitly depends on the naïve circularity of subjective idealism which is usually attributed to Hegel by simplistic readings of his work. Only the young Marx should be considered as derogatively "Hegelian", not Hegel himself. More precisely, in limiting itself to positing the (subjective) presuppositions (of religion), the young Marx's logic of dis-alienation would inevitably give logical priority to the *unity* of subjectivity and objectivity over the very positing of the subject. Or, better said, the positing would ultimately posit the presupposition (Christ as God-man; substance) as the *subjective* primordial unity of subject and object ("the full positing of presuppositions would amount to [the] subject's full retroactive positing / generation of its presuppositions"). On the contrary, in radical opposition to such a synthetic and pacifying view of origins, in analysing Christianity in his *Lectures on the Philosophy or Religion*, Hegel "presupposes the positing", that is, as Žižek puts it, his logico-ontological "starting point" corresponds to a non-unitary, pre-subjective "contingent multitude".[12] This means that the subject's positing of his own substantial presuppositions can only be thought as itself deriving from substance: through a three-phased retroactive sequence (contingent substance; subject; necessary substance), the subject is able to posit *après-coup* substance as necessity only insofar as substance has contingently given rise to subjectivity.[13]

It is possible to summarise all the above by arguing that, for Žižek, Marx's logic of dis-alienation ends up idealistically reifying the subject into substance (and vice versa) since it does not regard the subject's self-alienation as itself presupposed by substance's *non-totalizability*.[14] To put it simply, real materialism must pass through Hegel's "idealism", for only the latter effectively opposes any notion of "ontological completeness" and consistently claims — in accordance with some of the most important discoveries of twentieth-century science, *in primis*, quantum indeterminacy — that "material reality is non-all".[15] Žižek's reading of Hegel's philosophy of religion in "The Fear of Four Words" can thus not be limited to an attempt to demonstrate the way in which the "Christian legacy" (of love, fidelity to the event, maintenance of sexual difference, etc.)

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12 *Ibid*.

13 "For subjectivity to emerge — not as a mere epiphenomenon of the global substantial ontological order, but as essential to Substance itself — the split, negativity, particularization, self-alienation, must be posited as something that takes place in the very heart of the divine Substance" (*Ibid*., p. 59).

14 I agree with Badiou's suggestion that Žižek's "new interpretation" of Hegel primarily revolves around the fact that it "ceases to [be] subordinated to the motif of Totality" (*L'hypothèse communiste*, p. 187).

15 "The Fear of Four Words", p. 107, p. 95.

is "worth fighting for", that is to say, should be appropriated by real materialists as an anti-ideological weapon against so-called "democratic materialism" (its compulsory hedonism, false tolerance, spontaneous egalitarianism, etc.).[16] Hegel's account of the relation between substance and subject — especially as delineated in his philosophy of religion — rather amounts *tout-court* to *the* correct materialist ontology of incompleteness: in this sense, contemporary materialism can only be Hegelian. Furthermore, by formulating an ontology of irreducible multiplicities and void for which "the One emerges later" as well as, in parallel, by stressing the irreducibility of the subject's free act to the human animal — "repeat[ing] within the materialist frame the elementary gesture of idealist anti-reductionism: human Reason cannot be reduced to the result of evolutionary adaptation" — Badiou himself would be one of the few philosophers who today tacitly follows this Christian-Hegelian legacy.[17] (Let it be said in passing that Badiou would never accept such a lineage. Significantly enough, in the very same passage on Žižek from *L'hypothèse communiste* I quoted above, Badiou speaks of "two ways of saving today the Idea of communism in philosophy: renouncing Hegel, not without suffering for this, repeatedly examining his texts, which is what I do, or proposing a different Hegel, an unknown Hegel, which is what Žižek does starting from Lacan".[18])

While the broad speculative and political aims of the materialist agenda that makes Žižek privilege Hegel's indirect reconciliation over Marx's supposed direct dis-alienation are commendable — avoidance of the false alternative between the "radical culturalization" of Foucauldian discursive materialism and the "radical naturalization" of Chomskyan scientific materialism; grounding of the questions of freedom and equality beyond the dubious realism of Engelsian dialectical materialism and philosophy of nature — I find his insistence on defining his programme as a "materialist *theology*" very problematic to say the least.[19] Why, following Hegel's philosophy of religion, should the material

[16] On the anti-ideological function of the "Christian legacy", see especially Žižek's books of the early 2000s *The Fragile Absolute, or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for?* (London: Verso, 2001) and *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001). With regard to the legacy of Christian love in Žižek's works, see L. Chiesa, "Pasolini, Badiou, Žižek und das Erbe der christlichen Liebe" (in M. de Kesel & D. Hoens [eds.], *Wieder Religion?* [Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2006], pp. 107-126) and L. Chiesa & A. Toscano, "*Agape* and the Anonymous Religion of Atheism" (in *Angelaki*, 12, 1, 2007, pp. 113-126).

[17] "The Fear of Four Words", p. 92, p. 90.

[18] *L'hypothèse communiste*, p. 187. Although this is not stated explicitly, Badiou seems to imply that Žižek's "unknown Hegel" is, after all, not supported by textual evidence from Hegel's own works.

[19] "The Fear of Four Words", p. 82, p. 93, but see also *The Parallax View* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 68.

pre-subjective / pre-representational "it" of substance's contingent multiplicities be associated with God (or, more precisely, the "abyss of Godhead, the Origin-Source of everything")[20] and its dialectical sublation with the "monstrous" God-man of Christianity in which redeemed believers come to identify themselves as a community? At the risk of questioning what may seem obvious, we should ask ourselves whether, when, in polemics with Marx, Žižek states that "it is not only that humanity becomes conscious of itself in the alienated figure of God, but: in human religion, God becomes conscious of himself. It is not enough to say that people (individuals) organize themselves in the Holy Spirit (Party, community of believers): in humanity, a transsubjective 'it' organizes itself",[21] he is simply interpreting Hegel or seriously proposing the latter's philosophy of religion, *with all its self-evident anti-materialist theological implications*, as the only viable model for contemporary materialism. To put it even more simply, does Žižek assume that Hegel ultimately remains a Christian philosopher? Does he fully acknowledge that his own materialist project is after all promoting a Hegel-without-God and that the resumption of Hegel's philosophy of religion has in this context only an analogical role? My criticism here is straightforward: would it not be strategically more consistent for a materialist to understand the Hegelian threefold dialectical relation between substance and subject in non-theological terms, for instance by means of the set-theoretical axiom of separation (which could be used to conceive the presupposed contingent multiple of substance as anticipating what the subject *qua logos* retroactively separates out of it as a posited sub-multiple of substance)?[22] Even if we were to concede that Žižek somehow distances himself from so-called materialist theology — as he appears to be doing in at least one instance in "The Fear of Four Words" when, in the very last page, he specifies that "true atheism [should] return to belief (faith?), asserting it *without reference to God*" — would it be sufficient for him to rebrand his general philosophical enterprise as an "a-theology" whose main category

[20] "The Fear of Four Words", p. 36.

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 75-76.

[22] For a discussion of the axiom of separation in relation to Badiou's mathematical ontology of multiplicities and Lacan's notions of the Symbolic (subject) and the Real (substance), see L. Chiesa, "Count-as-one, Forming-into-one, Unary trait, S1", in P. Ashton, A.J. Bartlett, & J. Clemens (eds.), *The Praxis of Alain Badiou* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2006), especially p. 169.

is "unbelief" ("the pure form of belief deprived of its substantialization") in order to prevent real materialism from relapsing into religious obscurantism?[23]

My impression is that, in "The Fear of Four Words", Žižek dismisses the early Marx far too quickly. Texts such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and, especially, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" already offer us a materialist Hegel-without-God for whom, in opposition to Žižek claims, dis-alienation must be achieved *indirectly* by identifying with *human* monstrosity, that is to say, with the inhumanity of the *proletariat*. Furthermore, this is only possible after philosophy has reinvented itself as a *critique* of the critique of religion (namely, as a critique of the Feuerbachian logic of self-alienation / direct dis-alienation). Let us focus on the first point. I would argue that the truly materialist — i.e. philosophically non-theological — legacy of Hegel's four words "He was made man" is adopted and developed by the early Marx's notion of man's species-specific "impoverishment", or "denaturing" [*Entwesung*]:[24] the latter displaces the idea of "inappropriateness in general" from the level of the scandalous incarnation of the divine Logos to that of *homo sapiens* as an indeterminate — if not altogether non-adapted — speaking and working animal. Insofar as man has always lacked any specific determination, his nature is as such impoverished and, at the same time, irreducible to the animality of other species.[25] Most importantly, according to Marx, the historical emergence of the proletariat as the monstrous classless class "which is, in a word, the *total loss* of humanity"[26] should be regarded as a necessary precondition to grasp man's constitutive indeterminacy. This means that alienation is both structural (i.e. a substantial presupposition of the human animal) and dependent

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23 "The Fear of Four Words", p. 101 (my emphasis). John Milbank's patronising dialogue with Žižek's theological and political reflection (and manipulative appropriation of it) can only reinforce our doubts: Marx and Engels's warning against "Clerical Socialism" and "Feudal Socialism" — "half lamentation, half lampoon: half echo of the past, half menace of the future" — in *The Communist Manifesto* is still to be taken very seriously (see K. Marx & F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* [London: Penguin, 2002], pp. 245-247).

24 K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 118. On (dis-)alienation, see, more generally, the Third Manuscript, but also Sections XXII-XXVI of the Second Manuscript.

25 Giorgio Agamben has recently resumed this early-Marxian theme — without referring it to Marx — and developed it in terms of the theologico-political apparatus of "glory": "Human life is inoperative and without purpose, but precisely this *argia* and this absence of aim make the incomparable operativity [*operosità*] of the human species possible. Man has dedicated himself to production and labour [*lavoro*], because in his essence he is completely devoid of work [*opera*], because he is the Sabbatical animal *par excellence*" (*The Kingdom and the Glory* [Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2011]).

26 K. Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction", in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 256 (Marx's emphasis).

on a retroactive dialectic of asymptotic dis-alienation (i.e. a subjective positing that cannot be limited to the animality of the human animal, yet stems from it). In other words, not only does communist action indicate *après-coup* that indeterminacy has always been the unessential essence of man but, by promoting/producing equality as universal impoverishment — the proletariat's political universality lies, in the first place, in "universal suffering", the fact that "the wrong it suffers […] is *wrong in general*" and is thus addressed to all mankind –[27] also forever preserves indeterminacy, un-determines determination, that is, continuously *re*-determines the life of the human species through "*social* organs"[28] in particular historical situations. To sum up, for the early Marx, alienation cannot be accounted exclusively by means of subjective-ideological self-alienation; concomitantly, it is undistinguishable from indirect dis-alienation — to the extent that the latter precludes any final conciliatory *Aufhebung*.[29]

It is worth noting that, in "The Fear of Four Words", Žižek dwells on the issue of undetermined determination — and its continuous re-determination — precisely when he treats the relation between divine and human poverty in a *theological* context. Following Henry Corbin, Žižek criticises Eckhart whose mysticism would fail to acknowledge the materialist implications of incarnation highlighted later by Hegel's philosophy of religion; the Christian God really becomes God only insofar as he passes from "absolute indetermination" to "determinate (finite, temporal) reality", not vice versa (the idea of the personal God as just "one step on the way" of the mystic's communion with the abyss of Godhead).[30] Becoming man — "achieving 'poverty'", which can also be conceived as "monstrous" undetermined inappropriateness — God is "absolved of the indetermination of the original Absolute".[31] At the same time, he is able to redeem the determinate differences of man — human poverty as excentricity with regard to God and the rest of creation — precisely inasmuch as he has overcome primordial indetermination *qua* supreme negative determination ("the Absolute being absolved of all determination still remains to be absolved of this determination"[32]). Moreover, we should pay attention to the fact that incarnation

27 *Ibid*. (Marx's emphasis).

28 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 94 (Marx's emphasis).

29 For a more detailed discussion of the early Marx's concept of *Entwesung* (as well as a full explanation of the polysemy of the German term) in relation to the generic life of the human species and the universal production of communist action, see F. Ruda's remarkable article, "Humanism Reconsidered, or: Life Living Life", in *Filozofski Vestnik*, Volume XXX, Number 2, 2009.

30 "The Fear of Four Words", p. 41; H. Corbin, "Apophatic Theology as Antidote to Nihilism", in *Umbr(a)* 2007, p. 72.

31 "The Fear of Four Words", p. 39; "Apophatic Theology as Antidote to Nihilism", p. 71.

32 *Ibid*.

is perpetually renewed and must be regarded, in Corbin's own words, as "the *eternal birth* of the personal God".[33]

While it is easy to see the way in which this dialectical scheme of redemption could be mapped back onto Marx's dis-alienating logic of proletarian *Entwesung* as I described it above, we should not underestimate that, in "The Fear of Four Words", Žižek does not ever attempt explicitly to subtract it from the field of religious discourse. In one instance, he relates the passage from absolute indetermination to undetermined re-determination in Hegel's philosophy of religion to Freud's psychoanalysis, for which "the true task is not to uncover the pre-Oedipal primordial texture of drives that precedes the Oedipal order of the Law, but, on the contrary, to explain how, out of this primordial chaos of preontological virtualities, the Word (the symbolic Law) emerges" –[34] as well as, we should add, to return to the Word's emergence and reinvent it through psychoanalytic treatment. In another case, Žižek hints at the connection between Hegel's three-phased retroactive sequence contingent substance / subject / necessary substance and Freud's (and Lacan's) dialectical account of ontogenesis, by explaining how, for psychoanalysis, "there is a problem with [the] duality of [substantial] human animal and subject: in order for the Event to inscribe itself into the human animal's body, and thus transform the individual into the subject, this human animal itself has already to be derailed".[35] In my opinion, this specification — which I have tried to develop elsewhere independently as a problematisation of Badiou's contradictory understanding of the human animal –[36] rightly points in the direction of a more detailed investigation on the compatibility of the Freudian (and Lacanian) anthropology of "helplessness" [*Hilflosigkeit*] — the basic non-adaptation of *homo sapiens* with regard to its

33 *Ibid*., p. 72.

34 "The Fear of Four Words", p. 41.

35 *Ibid*., p. 93.

36 I have attempted to show how Lacan's pronouncements on the human animal provide us with a valuable tool to criticise Badiou's (unacknowledged) vacillation between an ultimately transcendent notion of the subject of the event and a certain biological exceptionality of *homo sapiens* as material support of the subject (see L. Chiesa, "The Body of Structural Dialectics. Badiou, Lacan, and the Human Animal", in *Nessie. Revue numérique de philosophie contemporaine*, 6, 2011). In a private conversation with me, Žižek has confessed that he also regards Badiou's notion of the human animal — and, more generally, his philosophy of nature — as the "Achilles' heel" of his system of thought. Žižek's position is confirmed by a short but eloquent passage from "The Fear of Four Word": "What Badiou misses is the fact that there is no human animal (governed by pleasure and reality principle, bent on survival, etc.) — with humanity proper, animality is derailed, instinct is transformed into drive, and it is only into such a distorted animal that an event can inscribe itself" ("The Fear of Four Words", p. 93).

environment –[37] with the Hegelian ontology of contingent multiplicities and the contiguous Christology of "inappropriateness in general"/"monstrosity". What, however, still remains to be unfolded in order to move *with* Žižek's materialism *beyond* its (a-)theological dimension is the link between, on the one hand, this complex Hegelo-Freudian motif — which I would propose to tentatively call "monstrous humanism" –[38] and, on the other, Marx's political universalism of *Entwesung* / proletarian "inhumanity".

The Proletarian Realisation of Philosophy

My general thesis is the following: the early Marx reinterprets what Žižek calls Hegel's "starting point" — substance as the contingent multiplicities of Godhead (the impersonal "it" of origins) — in terms of the human animal's pre-subjective "impoverishment" [*Entwesung*], its constitutive indetermination. In parallel, Christ's theological monstrosity (the trans-subjective "it" of the Church as a community) is translated politically into "the total loss of humanity" embodied by the proletariat. As Marx and Engels specify in the third part of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) in opposition to "the German *literati*'s" appropriation of the "Communist literature of France", such inhumanity should not abstractly be understood as a capitalised "'Alienation of Humanity'", for this would obliterate the criticism of the economic function of money and of the bourgeois state on which the creation of communism rests.[39] The historical emergence of the proletariat cannot simply be equated with a return to undetermined *Entwesung*. Conversely, to speak of "the interests of Human Nature, of Man in general, who belongs to no class" amounts to nothing else than to advocate an empty form of universalism that forecloses political economy; man-in-general "has no reality, […] exists only in the misty realm of philosophical fantasy" and the "no class" of abstract Human Nature must in no way be short-circuited with the classlessness of the proletariat.[40] Although this point has so far generally been overlooked by critics, I would claim that the early Marx provides us with a persuasive — albeit circumscribed — *economic* analysis of the link

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37 To put it in more explicitly Hegelo-Marxian terms, according to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the human animal is a helpless primate which retroactively transcends *itself* into an inter-subjective dialectic of *undetermined* (*qua* re-determined) desire. For a comprehensive treatment of this issue, see L. Chiesa, "The World of Desire: Lacan Between Evolutionary Biology and Psychoanalytic Theory", in *Filozofski Vestnik*, Volume XXX, Number 2, 2009.

38 On the contiguous notion of "humanism of impossibility", see again F. Ruda, "Humanism Reconsidered" and L. Chiesa "The Body of Structural Dialectics".

39 *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 248-249.

40 *Ibid*., p. 250.

between general *ontological* species-specific impoverishment (which is itself re-determined by historically different social organs / modes of production: ancient, feudal, mercantile, etc.) and the *political* inhumanity of the proletariat — which finally assumes impoverishment as such — whenever he brings into play the progressive, and inevitable, *pauperisation* of the bourgeoisie under capital. We should emphasise that this pauperisation is *de facto* a proletarianisation that proposes economically the classless class as a potential universality prior to any politicisation of the process in question. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write that "the lower strata of the middle class […] sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from *all* classes of the population".[41] The potential universality of purely economical proletarianisation, which is to say, the ultimate impossibility of dividing "true" capitalists and "proletarianisable" bourgeoisie into two different classes, is reinforced after few pages when the authors state that "entire sections of the *ruling classes* are […] precipitated into the proletariat".[42]

If we now turn to Marx's "Contribution", it is interesting to focus on the way in which this earlier text already further complicated the overlapping of the ontological, economical, and political aspects of "poverty". Here, in a dense paragraph that anticipates the analysis of the economical process of bourgeois pauperisation carried out in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx comes to distinguish "natural poverty" from "artificially produced poverty":[43] the proletariat is said to be formed primarily by the latter, that is, "not from the mass of people mechanically oppressed by the weight of society but from the mass of people issuing from society's *acute disintegration* and in particular from the dissolution of the middle class".[44] Therefore, not only, as we have seen in *The Communist Manifesto*, should the poverty of the proletariat be separated from the impoverishment of "Man in general", but also not reduced to the object of the oppression "naturally" exercised in a given society by what Marx names the — historically specific — "class of overt oppression".[45] Without this specification, we cannot properly appreciate the centrality of the epochal emergence of the proletariat, which brings about nothing less than a division of history into two. Although

41 *Ibid*., p. 228 (my emphasis).
42 *Ibid*., p. 230 (my emphasis)
43 "Contribution", p. 256.
44 *Ibid*. (Marx's emphasis).
45 *Ibid*., p. 254.

the theme of *Entwesung* is possibly less evident in the "Contribution" than in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, it is doubtless the case that we are dealing here with three different kinds of poverty: species-specific impoverishment; "natural" poverty caused by pre-capitalist economy; artificial poverty caused by Capital's unprecedented "acute disintegration" of society, that is, unnatural pauperisation of the ruling classes.

But what does Marx mean, more precisely, by "society's *acute* disintegration"? I would like to clarify this phrase from a different perspective by returning briefly to the issue of indirect dis-alienation as real dis-alienation in his early works. That which Marx calls, on the very same pages of the "Contribution", "the total redemption of humanity"[46] can historically commence through revolutionary communist action only after the middle class / bourgeoisie has itself become "artificially" (we could also say "inappropriately"…) impoverished / disintegrated — in a potentially universal way. In this sense, (economic and religious) dis-alienation cannot be direct since it must also involve the class that rules and structures society as such, the very presupposition of its alienating function: real dis-alienation necessitates the bourgeoisie — the class that establishes, supports, and controls capitalist productive and ideological alienation — being put in a position from which it can assume, as well as re-determine, together with all other classes, the general poverty of the species in its historical particularity — i.e. identify with the "monstrosity" of the proletariat. Beyond any theoretically local critique of (capitalist-bourgeois) society, its "acute" disintegration is needed for real dis-alienation to take place; the struggle for the universalism of equality can be initiated only after "the dissolution of all classes" has occurred; the proletariat, first and foremost, the becoming-proletarian of the bourgeoisie, "*is* [such] *actual* dissolution".[47]

At this stage, it is crucial not to lose sight of the fact that, in the "Contribution", Marx discusses indirect dis-alienation through active identification with the political universality of the proletariat at the same time as he *criticises* the critique of religion. The two issues cannot be separated. I come here to my second main objection to Žižek's dismissal of the early Marx. While the "Contribution" is mostly remembered for the motto "[religion] is the *opium* of the people"[48] — a perfect formula for an understanding of religion as direct self-alienation — critics often underrate that this is the position Marx unequivocally parts ways with and intends to overcome. It goes without saying that Marx

[46] *Ibid*., p. 256.
[47] *Ibid*. (Marx's emphasis).
[48] *Ibid*., p. 244 (Marx's emphasis).

shares with Feuerbach the idea that "*Man makes religion*, religion does not make man"; however, according to Marx, it is now a matter of "unmask[ing] self-estrangement in its *unholy forms* once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement [i.e. religion] has been unmasked".[49] In other words, "the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*".[50] It seems to me uncontroversial that such programmatic statement witnesses to a major shift of interest towards political economy which will constitute the basis of Marx's later — and most well-known — works. In addition to this, the "Contribution" openly and repeatedly presents this separation from Feuerbach's "criticism of religion" in favour of an engagement with the "*truth of this world*" as an enterprise that *philosophy* alone can accomplish: it is nothing other than "the immediate *task of philosophy*".[51] As Lucio Colletti argues, in the "Contribution", "Marx is concerned with redefining the object of philosophy. Philosophy must criticize not *religion* (as Feuerbach and others would have it) but the *real* world, of which religion is merely the 'halo'".[52] In other words, political acts in the real world, and eventually the promotion of communism as universal equality, rely on the philosophical overcoming of the critique of religion as self-alienation, and vice versa. Indirect dis-alienation by means of political economy goes together with indirect dis-alienation by means of a redefined philosophy that abandons the "misty realm of fantasy". Most importantly, the notion and reality of the proletariat as discussed above (its function of redeeming humanity through its total loss, i.e. through the emergence and assumption of its poverty-impoverishment) lie at the juncture between these two strands of emancipation (practical and theoretical) and bridge their gap: the *proletariat realizes philosophy*. As Marx has it, "just as philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *intellectual* weapons in philosophy".[53]

If, on the one hand, Žižek correctly insists on the association of indirect dis-alienation with a critique of the critique of religion, on the other, he fails to grasp their inextricability in the works of the early Marx, whose position he prefers to identify with Feuerbach's. For this reason, Žižek does not even acknowledge that the early Marx's notion of dis-alienation as a critique of the critique of religion is already explicitly formulated in the guise of a philosophy for which "the criticism of theology [should turn] into the criticism of politics":

49 *Ibid*. (Marx's emphasis).
50 *Ibid*., pp. 244-245 (Marx's emphases).
51 *Ibid*., p. 244 (Marx's emphases).
52 L. Colletti in K. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 243.
53 "Contribution", p. 257 (Marx's emphases).

the correlation of theory and practice thanks to which philosophy is realised in the proletariat, and thus abolished as a separate abstract field, cannot give rise to a (Hegelian) philosophy of religion — as, on the contrary, Žižek's materialist a-theology seems to imply. To put it differently, I would suggest that in "The Fear of Four Words" — but the claim could also be applied to a different degree to earlier texts — Žižek underestimates the truly philosophical — that is, materialist and anti-theological — depth of the foundations of the critique of political economy laid by Marx's writings of the 1840s. In this way, he runs the risk of magnifying out of proportion a supposed break between the early (idealist and ontological) and the later (materialist and politico-economical) Marx, which is not supported by textual evidence. This threat becomes clear when, in "The Fear of Four Words", Žižek speaks approvingly of (the later) Marx's notion of freedom only a couple of pages before attacking his notion of dis-alienation as naively anti-ideological.[54] The unavoidable question here is the following: how would have Marx been able to develop a correct dialectical notion of freedom, for which — as Žižek lucidly explains in agreement with my previous analysis of bourgeois emancipation as a precondition for real dis-alienation — "it is the very 'alienated, bourgeois' freedom which creates the conditions and opens up the space for 'actual' freedom",[55] out of an incorrect — only apparently dialectical — notion of dis-alienation/emancipation entirely dependent on the motto "religion is the opium of the people"? Last but not least, on this basis, Žižek's analysis of the early Marx is also liable to being confused with Engels's reading (itself appropriated by Plekhanov, Lenin and, through them, by the Marxist orthodoxy of Really Existing Socialism), which reputed this phase of his thought to be incompatible with the dominant philosophy of nature of dialectical materialism but, contradictorily, also aimed at minimising any difference between the latter and Marx's overall oeuvre.[56] Thus, as Colletti writes in his introduction to *Early Writings*, after Marx's youthful philosophical work was published largely between 1927 and 1932, "they became, almost at once, 'the early writings'. […] The adjective 'early' served to emphasize their heterogeneity and discontinuity *vis-à-vis* the doctrine of the subsequent period. […] They were seen above all as

[54] "For Marx […] communism will not abolish freedom but, by abolishing capitalist servitude, bring about actual freedom, the freedom which will no longer be the form of appearance of its opposite" ("The Fear of Four Words", p. 71). Marx and Engels already outline this argument in *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 237.

[55] "The Fear of Four Words", p. 71.

[56] Žižek has always condemned orthodox dialectical materialism, including Lenin's, for its naïve notion of matter ("materialism has nothing to do with the presence of damp, dense matter", *ibid.*, p. 91; see also p. 107).

the remains of a line of thought which had led nowhere, or into a blind alley".[57] While this juxtaposition with Marxist "orthodoxy" does not render justice to Žižek's detailed and highly original investigation of the theme of dis-alienation/freedom, which was undoubtedly marginalised by the Engelsians, it can nonetheless not be averted as long as his overall interpretative framework relies on a neat division between the two Marxs ("Feuerbachian pseudo-Hegelian" young Marx — in Žižek's own words — versus truly Marxian later Marx).

Given Žižek's inability to recognise indirect dis-alienation and the critique of the critique of religion as central elements of the production of the early Marx, I find it all the more remarkable that, in his recent and powerful *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, he seems to be calling for a programmatic displacement of philosophy from the critique of ideology and of religion to the critique of political economy that closely resembles the one carried out by the early Marx in the "Contribution". Inevitably, this shift — intended, first and foremost, in function of the promulgation of a new "communist hypothesis" — also amounts to a less enthusiastic, or, at least, less unilateral, assessment of the legacy of Hegelian dialectics to contemporary materialism. In a number of important passages from *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Žižek appears to be updating almost verbatim the distinction between (Feuerbach's) anti-ideological "irreligious criticism"[58] and communist theory carried out by Marx in the first pages of the "Contribution". Žižek's bold definition of philosophers as the only "true *realists*" should appropriately be contextualised in this light.[59] According to him, our late-capitalist predicament, characterised by the double death of Fukuyama's dream of "the end of history" and of the ideal of global politico-economical freedom of the "happy '90s" — suffered, respectively, at the hands of 9/11 and the 2008 financial meltdown — offers philosophy an epochal opportunity to distinguish the real world from that portrayed by "liberal utopia".[60] The latter should be conceived as nothing else than a "utopia in power", in spite of the fact that, by posing as "pragmatic realism", it presents itself as a "neutral social mechanism" which is spontaneous (if not even natural) and thus entitled to condemn any antagonistic ideology as potentially totalitarian.[61] The anti-fundamentalist and de-regulative imperatives of the ruling utopia ulti-

57 L. Colletti, "Introduction", in K. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 15.
58 K. Marx, "Contribution", p. 244.
59 S. Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, p. 79 (my emphasis).
60 *Ibid*., p. 3, p. 79.
61 *Ibid*., p. 79, p. 77, p. 25. "Capitalism itself is presented in technical terms, not even as a science but simply as something that works" (*ibid*.).

mately serve only capital — *qua* the "Real of our lives" — [62] but can today be unmasked by thought for what they truly represent beyond any opportunistic apology of liberalism. On the politico-economical level, the contemporary task of philosophy is to highlight the way in which the alleged reformist gradualism of liberal capitalism — "the liberal-pragmatic idea that one can solve problems gradually, one by one ('people are dying right now in Rwanda, so let's forget about anti-imperialist struggle')" — is actually promoting a worldwide authoritarian "capitalism with Asian values" that has by now abandoned any democratic simulacrum.[63] At the same time, on the anti-ideological/"irreligious" level, which is itself firmly grounded on the politico-economical, philosophy can finally denounce the way in which liberal anti-fundamentalism is of necessity accompanied by a new triumph of religion; "Religion is now reinventing its role" as the explicit/direct utopia/ideology disallowed by the implicit/indirect utopia/ideology of capitalism, especially insofar as the latter "is not global at the level of meaning, there is no 'capitalist world view', no 'capitalist civilization' proper", and its global dimension pertains exclusively to the "truth without meaning" of the Real of the market.[64]

Although Žižek sporadically refers to Lacan and reworks the latter's distinction between truth and meaning via Badiou, the notion of the "Real" which he recurrently refers to is definitely more indebted to Marx, *in primis* the early Marx, than to psychoanalysis.[65] I would argue that this is not sufficiently acknowledged: *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* openly presents itself as a Marxian text to the extent that its main message is the promotion of a "communist hypothesis" — one that maintains "the precise reference to a set of actual social antagonisms which generates the need for communism; Marx's notion of communism not as an ideal, but as a movement which reacts to such antagonisms, is still fully relevant".[66] However, the book does not engage with Marx's work analytically enough and thus overshadows what could be taken as a clear turn in Žižek's thought from the Hegelian-Christian "four words" to the Marxian-communist

62 *Ibid*., p. 80.

63 *Ibid*., p. 77, p. 131.

64 *Ibid*., p. 25.

65 The same applies to Badiou's use of the "real" in *L'hypothèse communiste*. In spite of the fact that, in the last chapter — entitled "L'idée du communisme" — the "three instances of the Subject according to Lacan: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic" are widely employed as a basic matrix to "formalise the operation of the Idea in general, and the communist Idea in particular" (p. 187), the primary meaning of the term "real" in this book refers — like Žižek's "Real of our lives" — to the "immediate and reflected life of all those who live in this [capitalist] world" (p. 78). The Marxian origin of this terminology emerges clearly in the chapter entitled "De quel réel cette crise est-elle le spectacle?", dedicated to the 2008 financial meltdown.

66 *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, pp. 87-88.

"real world". Žižek re-enacts the early Marx's critique of the (liberal) critique of religion/ideology and, with the same move, also criticises his own critique of the critique of religion — incorrectly addressed against the early Marx — that is, his Hegelian materialist a-theology, its forgetting of the "real" of political economy, ultimately, its being a philosophy of *religion*, and not a philosophy. If Žižek's work of the 1990s can be regarded mainly as a continuation of the Freudo-Marxian tradition, focusing on the link between commodity fetishism and the superego's libido, i.e. the structurally "obscene" side of power, and that of the 2000s revolves around a resumption of the Christian legacy whose most noticeable outcome is a Hegelian materialist a-theology that tends to confine its Marxian politico-economical corollaries to a journalistic context (a split between theory and practice?), the 2010s announce to be a decade in which Žižek will consecrate himself to the resumption of communism as *philosophy*, for which, following Marx, the critique of the critique of ideology issues into politico-economical thought.

My argument is reinforced by at least two further topics Žižek incisively treats in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. First and foremost, his preservation and stressing of the notion of the proletariat — which, as we have seen, according to Marx, realises philosophy — together with his detailed investigation of contemporary forms of universal becoming-proletarian. For Žižek, not only should we "certainly not drop the notion of the proletariat, or of the proletarian position", but resist the "triple threat" posed today to the "commons" of culture, external nature, and internal nature — by, respectively, the notion of private property in relation to "intellectual" property, the impending ecological catastrophe, and the implications of new developments in biogenetic technology — that potentially "renders us all proletarians".[67] These threats, themselves strictly related to the persistence of capitalism's socio-politico-economical apartheid between classes, help us identifying today's antagonisms; in other words, the reference to the new threatened commons and to "apocalyptic proletarianization" justifies a resuscitation of communism.[68] I would add that since, as Žižek overtly concedes, contemporary proletarianisation is also closely related to the "potential scarcity

[67] *Ibid*., p. 92; see also p. 99.

[68] *Ibid*., p. 94. Having said this, Žižek also believes that "'class' struggle between the Excluded and the Included" (*ibid*., p. 99) should no longer be given priority over other forms of (intellectual, ecological, biogenetic) antagonism. This is clearly incompatible with the central role Marx assigns to the proletariat *qua* class struggle. Personally, I disagree with Žižek's attempt to motivate his marginalisation of class struggle — and, conversely, his generalisation of the proletariat — by relating it to the obvious implausibility of "the old Marxist logic of 'historical necessity'" (*ibid*.). Here, he runs the risk of throwing away the baby with the bathwater…

of three basic material resources (oil, water, and food)",[69] the early Marx's motif of the historical (re-)emergence of species-specific impoverishment/*Entwesung* could here be revisited and valorised also from a geo-political perspective.

With regard to the second topic that I believe further substantiates my reading of *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* as heavily dependent on Marx, and the early Marx in particular, in it, Žižek resolutely upholds that the only real political alternative for the future is that between communism and socialism. On this point, he could not have been more adamant: "Communism is to be opposed to socialism, which, in place of the egalitarian collective, offers an organic community (Nazism was national socialism, not national communism)".[70] Most importantly, "the only way for the global capitalist system to survive its long-term antagonism and simultaneously avoid the communist solution, will be for it to reinvent some kind of socialism — in the guise of communitarianism, or populism, or capitalism with Asian values, or some other configuration".[71] Therefore, the alternative between communism and socialism turns out to conceal a more fundamental opposition between communism and *socialist capitalism*. Here Žižek agrees with Michael Hardt and the Negrian anti-socialist — albeit clearly not dualistic — rhetoric of *Goodbye Mr. Socialism* in claiming that, in addition to eliminating private property, communism should also aim at overcoming state property, that is to say, "property as such in the commons".[72]And yet, he does not ever quote Marx's own incredibly derogative pronouncements on socialism, or comment on them; these can leave no doubt as to the reasons why (the early) Marx did *not* deem it to be the "lower phase" of communism, as instead Really Existing Socialism insisted on claiming.[73] While I would argue that such an attack is fully developed from a politico-economical standpoint only in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), where Marx takes into consideration specific historical events and political parties (the rise to power of Napoleon III and the role of French Social Democracy in it), we already find a whole-hearted theoretical denunciation of (reactionary, conservative or bourgeois, and critical-utopian) "socialist literature" in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), one that occupies more than a fifth of the entire book. If, on the one hand, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* shares with Žižek a condemnation without

69 *Ibid*., p. 83.
70 *Ibid*., p. 95.
71 *Ibid*.
72 *Ibid*.
73 Žižek is rather ambiguous on this point. In passing, he states that, for Marx, socialism was "vulgar communism" (*ibid*.). He must have specified that this "vulgarity" should in no way be confused with the "roughness" of a presumed "lower phase".

appeal of socialism's (authoritarian; anti-democratic) aspiration to transform class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat into a utopian "harmonious whole",[74] on the other, *The Communist Manifesto* vividly anticipates the thesis according to which socialism remains after all internal to the economic logic of capitalism and the bourgeoisie: "The Socialistic bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. *They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat*".[75]

Either Hegel or Marx, or Both…

Interestingly enough, in the conclusion of *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Žižek associates the sharp division between communism and socialism with the neat separation he draws between a progressive and a reactionary Hegel: "The future will be Hegelian […]. The only true alternative that awaits us — the alternative between socialism and communism — is the alternative between the two Hegel. […] Hegel's 'conservative' vision uncannily points forward to 'capitalism with Asian values': a capitalist civil society organized into estates and kept in check by a strong authoritarian state with managerial 'public servants' and traditional values. (Contemporary Japan comes close to this model.)".[76] With regard to the "progressive" Hegel, referring to Susan Buck-Morss, Žižek speaks of "the Hegel of Haiti": the slave uprising that resulted in the constitution of the free Haitian republic took the libertarian/egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution more literally than the French themselves and should be considered as the historical source of inspiration for the emancipative Hegelian dialectics of Master and Slave.[77] Against post-colonial studies' campaigning for "self-definition", real freedom for colonised/enslaved nations can only stem from an appropriation of the egalitarian philosophical tradition of the oppressors; in this way, the latter is itself, with the very same move, redefined and fully actualised.[78]

Although Žižek does not explain the details of this dialectical passage, it is doubtless the case that he is here developing another variant of the Hegelian logic of indirect dis-alienation investigated in "The Fear of Four Words", this

74 K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr &Company, 1913), p. 52.
75 *Ibid*., p. 252 (my emphasis). Here, Marx and Engels explicitly condemn Proudhon.
76 *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, p. 148. See also p. 131.
77 *Ibid*., pp. 111-112.
78 *Ibid*., p. 120.

time applying it explicitly to politics via the Haitian "point of reference". We should therefore not be surprised by the fact that, in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, the promulgation of a communist hypothesis inextricably linked to the constitution of a new "Hegelian Left"[79] — in its turn regarded as antithetical to the proto-socialist "harmonious whole" of Hegel's own conservative vision — is, at the same time, (at least in one instance), identified with Christianity, or, more precisely, "the 'Holy Spirit' — the space of a collective of believers *subtracted* from the field of organic communities, or of particular life-worlds ('neither Greeks nor Jews')".[80] Žižek is clearly attempting to both sublate and further complicate the protracted oscillation between the Christian-Hegelian and the Communist-Marxian poles of his thought. On the one hand, we are offered with a political constellation in which philosophy renders the Christian "four words" compatible with the enslaved proletarians' "world to be won" of Marxian memory. On the other hand, this very relation — and especially the complex way in which Žižek arrives at its formulation — obliges us to assess a series of unexpected paradoxes concerning the history of philosophy and its legacy: the "good" Hegel is a true communist, unlike "standard" Marxists. Conversely, the "good" Marx is a true Hegelian: this is the very reason why the "early" Marx is both "pseudo-Hegelian" (like the "bad" Hegel) and not yet a communist.

In addition to my reservations concerning Žižek's reading of Marx's writings of the 1840s, I believe that there remains two main open questions about his overall Hegelo-Marxian project — which, let it be avowed plainly, I continue to find extremely stimulating and far more systematic than superficial critics often assume. The two questions at stake can perhaps be better expressed as two risks that must be averted. Firstly, Žižek should at all costs keep away from the all-encompassing, and consequently almost meaningless, theologico-politico-philosophical equations proposed by Gianni Vattimo's "Catholic-Communism": in the latter's works of the last five years, especially *Ecce Comu* (2007), not only are Catholicism and Communism used as quasi-synonyms, but also all too hurriedly superimposed with so-called "weak thought" ("It is as a 'weak' philosopher and as a Christian that I am becoming communist again"), emancipative Nietzschean nihilism ("A Leftist political position in the spirit of 'weak'

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

philosophy or, more clearly, nihilism"), as well as hermeneutics.[81] Secondly, Žižek should avoid falling back into a rigidly dichotomic reading of Hegel that, at a close inspection, results to be more indebted to Engels than Marx. As Colletti reminds us, while Engels and the Left Hegelians — as well as Really Existing Socialism after them — "held that there was a contradiction in Hegel between his revolutionary principles [and method] and his conservative conclusions",[82] Marx "distinguishes not the revolutionary method from the conservative system, but two different and opposed aspects *of the Hegelian dialectic itself* — that is, two aspects of the 'method'. These are the 'rational kernel' which must be saved, and the 'mystical shell' which should be discarded".[83] I would claim that, for the sake of his materialist programme, Žižek should resist the temptation to divide neatly between a revolutionary and a conservative Hegel, and, rather, carefully ponder the way in which the "two aspects of the method" inevitably lead to discard the Christian legacy as part of the "mystical shell". Moreover, I would also single out the first chapter of Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* — a book Žižek has often admitted to admire — as a model for such anti-Christian reassessment of the legacy of Hegel's dialectics to contemporary materialism and the communist hypothesis, one that further problematises "the two aspects of the method". For Badiou, "there are two dialectical matrixes in Hegel […] It is the kernel itself that is cracked"; out of this constitutive division, we cannot

81 G. Vattimo, *Ecce Comu. Come si ri-diventa ciò che si era* (Rome: Fazi, 2007), p. 91, p. 93 (see also p. 79). Vattimo's Catholic-Communist facile slogans sound at times uncannily Žižekian. For instance, contemporary Leftist culture should pay more attention to the "possibility of founding a politics on nihilism, that is to say, on a *Christianity understood as the message of the* kenosis*, the Incarnation of God who becomes man* and, in this way, abandons and secularizes his violent and primitive essence" (p. 97, my emphasis). In the same context, "becoming communist again" entails "thinking our current [political] situation in 'apocalyptic' terms" (p. 59). For Žižek's detailed account of the Christian *kenosis* — which would be what "the standard Marxist critique of religion as the self-alienation of humanity misses" — and of "an eschatological apocalyptism which does *not* involve the fantasy of the symbolic Last Judgement", see, respectively, "The Fear of Four Words" (pp. 57-61) and *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (pp. 148-151) (Žižek's recent major book is significantly entitled *Living in the End Times*).

82 L. Colletti, "Introduction", p. 11. The sentence continues as follows: "Hegel had chosen to come to a personal compromise with the Prussian state, against his own principles. Once liberated from his compromise, the essentially revolutionary principles of his philosophy were destined to dominate the future". This common interpretation of Hegelian politics as a "compromise" is by no means confined to orthodox Marxism: for instance, Carl Schmitt similarly proposes that "Hegel's philosophy […] sought a systematic mediation of revolution and tradition". However, for Schmitt, at its core, "it could be considered to be conservative, and it was". Its revolutionary principles are actually just "revolutionary sparks" (*Theory of the Partisan* [New York: Telos Press, 2007], p. 48).

83 "Introduction", p. 13 (Colletti's emphasis). Although this view is openly stated only in the "Post-face" to the second edition of *Capital* (1873), Colletti convincingly maintains that it already informs the early Marx thanks to his appropriation of Feuerbach's anti-Hegelian link between the critique of religion and materialism (*ibid.*, pp. 11-12).

derive any "secondary unity" of the kernel; the absence of a unitary kernel in the materialist matrix of Hegelian dialectics is precisely what denounces — beyond Hegel's intentions — Christianity's "theological circularity, which, presupposing the absolute in the seeds of the beginning, leads back to this very beginning once all stages of its effectuation, its alienation, its going outside itself, and so on, are unfolded".[84]

[84] A. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 3, p. 19. In spite of his later proudly professed anti-Hegelianism, Badiou's Marxian-Maoist reading of Hegel remains unsurpassed. Yet, it must be noted that — unlike Žižek — Badiou locates the theme of "alienation" at the heart of the *idealist* matrix of Hegelian dialectics, not of the materialist (*ibid*., p. 3).